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SUBJECT: GHANA'S NEW PARLIAMENT SWORN IN

Classified By: POLCHIEF GPERGL FOR REASONS 1.4 b&d

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Ghana's fifth Parliament of the Fourth Republic was sworn in on January 7, just hours prior to the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party's John Evans Atta Mills taking the oath of office as Ghana's new president. As their first order of business, members elected a new Speaker, Joyce Bamford Addo, the first female Speaker in Ghana's history. MPs also elected two deputy Speakers and majority and minority party leadership. Both members of the People's National Convention (PNC) party have opted to sit on the majority NDC party's side of the aisle, as did one of four independent MPs. This gives the NDC, which holds 114 seats, a working majority of 117 votes. The other three independents (all former NPP members) will be sitting with the minority New Patriotic Party (NPP), as will Samia Nkrumah, the lone Convention People's Party (CPP) member. Nkrumah, however, has vowed to vote independently on issues based on their merit, and has also called for a revision of Parliament's standing orders to allow her to sit by herself, unaligned with majority or minority. This cable provides brief bios of Parliament's top officials and background on the political maneuvering behind their selections. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) As soon as Ghana's new Parliament was sworn in, 228 of a total 230 MPs ceremonially crossed the aisle, signifying the change of NDC from minority to majority party, and the NPP from majority to minority. Two seats have yet to be decided in Parliament. In Akwatia, in the Eastern Region, where the NPP candidate was leading, miscreants seized ballot boxes at six polling stations during the voting process, and the Electoral Commission decided to re-do the election there on January 11. In the Brong-Ahafo Region's Asutifi South constituency, the NDC candidate won by four votes, but the contest is tied up in court. The NDC fell two short of the 116 votes required for a Parliamentary majority, and has managed to entice one independent and both of the PNC's two MPs to side with them in the legislature. (NOTE: Embassy has learned that in exchange for their allegiance, the PNC drove a hard bargain: their members will receive 2 Minister jobs, 2 Deputy Ministers, 4 Ambassadorial appointments, 5 District Chief Executive positions, and 15 lucrative memberships on various quasi-government boards such as the Volta River Authority, Social Security National Insurance Trust, and marketing boards for cocoa, oil, and minerals. END NOTE). Even with the promise of this coalition, the margin in Parliament is so close that the majority party will need to manage its votes very carefully.

¶3. (C) Joyce Bamford Addo, the new Speaker of Parliament, was a surprise choice, but apparently a good one who was confirmed unanimously by both parties. Although she does not have strong party affiliations, her husband was a Major General who served on Jerry Rawlings' Council of State, and Rawlings appointed her to the Supreme Court. She served as a Supreme Court Judge from 1991 to 2004, retiring early when President John Kufuor, looking for someone more closely

aligned with the NPP, passed her over for the position of Chief Justice despite her seniority. She was born in 1937, received her law degree in London and practiced there from 1961 to 1963, when she returned to Ghana to become a State's Attorney. Addo is considered a very capable law practitioner who served as Deputy Speaker in the Consultative Assembly which drafted Ghana's current Constitution in 1992. For the past four years, she has remained home raising her grandchildren, and was considered a political outsider--which may account for the NPP's easy acceptance of her. For the NDC, her selection immediately begins to fulfill their promise to seek closer gender equality in government, while at the same time serving to check the powers of Chief Justice Georgina Woods, who is considered to have a strong NPP bias. (NOTE: Woods' sister is married to the NPP lawyer who represented the party in its failed attempt on New Year's Day to prevent the Electoral Commission from announcing the election results. The more paranoid among NDC party members see Woods' hand in allowing the Fast Track Court to sit on a public holiday. END NOTE). The appointment of a legal scholar as Speaker can also be seen as a caution to the judiciary to be less partisan, especially in any upcoming cases involving election results. Finally, the party saw Addo as a consensus candidate who would be acceptable to the NPP minority. Party leadership held out against pressure on two fronts: one was to appoint an ethnic Ewe from the Volta Region, and the other was to present Betty Mould Iddrisu, a polarizing and highly partisan voice in the NDC who is married to the party's national campaign chairman. She was being pushed by Rawlings for Mills' running mate last year--Mills instead chose John Mahama.

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14. (C) The position of First Deputy Speaker went to Edward Doe Adjaho, an ethnic Ewe MP from Volta Region who had been Deputy Minority Leader. Adjaho is considered a very good lawyer with a firm grasp of parliamentary procedure. In his new position, he will be chairing the appointments committee, which is tasked with doing due diligence on any executive appointments. Despite being the second highest ranking post in Parliament, the First Deputy Speaker has little real power, and it is doubtful that Adjaho will want to remain in the position for very long. For the moment, however, the NDC is attempting to put good people in key positions to provide stability during the transition.

15. (C) The Second Deputy Speaker is traditionally a member of the largest minority party, but in the last Parliament the NPP bypassed the NDC and chose CPP's Freddy Blay, an NPP ally, for this slot. The NDC could have played payback by slamming one of their new PNC best friends into this position, but chose instead to take the high road and name Prof. Mike Oquaye, a respected NPP parliamentarian and professor of law from the Greater Accra Region. Oquaye, a former Fulbright scholar, was Ghana's ambassador to India, and served as Minister of Energy and Minister of Communications in the second Kufuor administration.

16. (C) The real power in the new Parliament is Alban Bagbin, the new Majority Leader, who has the authority to bring forward new legislation, delay bills, hold up appointments, and perform a number of other functions that can make or break a bill's chances of becoming law. Bagbin was born in 1957 in the Upper West Region, in the constituency which he now represents. He is one of the most accomplished parliamentarians, having served on committees for subsidiary legislation and constitutional, legal, and parliamentary affairs. He has been an MP for the NDC since the Fourth Republic was established in 1992. He had been Minority Leader for the past eight years, and his move to Majority Leader was a logical one for the party. Some party insiders, however, feel that he has been blessed with leadership positions in Parliament for too long, so he may not last long in his new position. He also did not take an activist role in Atta Mills' campaign. The new Deputy Majority Leader,

John Akolgu Tia, served as minority whip in the last Parliament, and was moved up to Bagbin's deputy because the former deputy minority leader became First Deputy Speaker. He represents a constituency in the Upper East. It is unlikely that the party would allow politicians from the far north to concurrently occupy such key positions, so clearly either he or Bagbin will not be remaining for too long.

17. (C) For the minority party, the new leader will be Osei Kyei Mensah Bonsu, an MP from Ashanti Region who was deputy majority leader and a minister of state. Again, he was a logical choice as the most knowledgeable legislator for the NPP, since the former Majority Leader lost his bid to remain in Parliament. The Deputy Minority Leader will be Ambrose Dery from the Upper East, a former member of the PNC, former Deputy Attorney General, and Regional Minister for Upper East from 2005-2007. He has a somewhat controversial background, having been the lawyer for Mallam Issa, the NPP Youth and Sports Minister who was imprisoned for corruption under Kufuor's first administration. Some saw this as a show trial, especially since Dery was named Deputy Attorney General shortly after his client was hauled off to jail. Issa, by the way, just received a full pardon from President Kufuor as part of a flurry of last minute pardons announced earlier this week (septel).

18. (C) COMMENT. The NDC is moving cautiously in its appointments as it attempts to consolidate power and stabilize its tenuous grasp on Parliament without making any missteps or alienating the opposition. Atta Mills has led the way in promising true reconciliation for the nation, saying he would not be conducting witch hunts for past political transgressions. We suspect that ministerial appointments may be delayed as legislative committees are put into place to vet executive appointments. Even if somewhat diminished in recent years, tribal politics still play a role in Ghana, and the NDC has been careful to strike an ethnic balance in its government. Atta Mills is a Fante from Western Region, his vice president John Mahama is a Gonja from the Northern Region, and Ms. Addo, the new Speaker, is an Akan from the Eastern Region. The Kufuor-appointed Chief Justice Georgina Woods is a Ga from Greater Accra. The NDC's stronghold, the Volta Region, populated primarily by ethnic Ewes, at this point remains under-represented, and it is a fair bet that key ministerial choices will be coming from that region.

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